

Arsenal Plans Reduction of Working Force

Cutbacks in ammunition production schedules at Joliet Arsenal will result in about 850 workers being laid off gradually during February, it was announced today by Col. R. B. Currrens, arsenal commander, and J. Scott Brown, manager of the U. S. Rubber Co.'s operations at the Kankakee unit of the arsenal.

THEY ALSO pointed out that the economic impact of the layoffs is distributed over a wide area, since the Arsenal draws its work force from many different communities within a 50-mile radius.

Not affected by the current layoffs are the 900 employees of the Ordnance Ammunition Center, which is located on the grounds of Joliet Arsenal.

Approximately 500 civil service employees of the Army Ordnance corps who work at the Elwood unit of the Arsenal will be laid off in separate groups on Feb. 5, Feb. 19, and March 1. This amounts to 15 per cent of the present 3,350 government employees at the Elwood unit. This part of the arsenal loads and assembles finished ammunition.

ABOUT 350 U. S. Rubber Co. employees at the Kankakee unit will be terminated in small groups during February. At present, the work force there totals 3,900, so the layoff of 350 workers represents a decrease of 9 per cent. The U. S. Rubber Co. produces TNT and other high explosives for the Army at the Kankakee unit.

Altogether, the combined reduction of 850 workers represents slightly more than 11 per cent of the 7,250 people now employed by the entire arsenal.

The February layoff continues the downward trend at the installation which began last September. Peak employment last August totaled 9,200, which included about 4,700 workers at the Elwood unit and 4,500 at the Kankakee unit. Since then, the total number of workers has come down to the present 7,250 figure, partly thru layoffs and partly by attrition—that is, not replacing workers who voluntarily quit their jobs, Col. Currrens said.

THE END of the Korean conflict and the armed forces' reduced demand for ammunition were cited by Col. Currrens as the basic reasons for cutbacks in Joliet Arsenal's production schedules and the resulting reduction in the need for workers. He pointed out that ammunition production in the U. S. reached very high levels in 1953, and for the past several months production schedules and employment have been gradually reduced in all 23 ammunition plants and powder works of the Army Ordnance corps. All of these 23 installations, of which Joliet Arsenal is one, are directed and supervised by the Ordnance Ammunition Center in Joliet.

Both Col. Currrens and Brown said that the Ordnance corps and U. S. Rubber are making every effort to reduce the work force at the arsenal gradually and efficiently, so as to keep the dislocation of personnel to a minimum and avoid economic hardships for individual workers. Workers laid off will be recalled, they said, if there is any increase in ammunition requirements.